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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a description of the Minority Graduate Fellowship Program created by the School of Education, Human Services and Humanities at the West Virginia Graduate College. The program's purpose is to increase the minority presence within its faculty, recruit minorities to this geographical area, and to assist young professionals with their socialization into the professorate. The intent of the program is that minorities should benefit from the experience and develop a support system to help them in the pursuit of their goals. The paper describes the strengths and weaknesses of the program which involved three minority fellows during the 1991-92 school year. Recommendations made to assist those who might be considering establishing similar programs include the following: (1) a specific orientation program should be part of the early experiences of the fellows and all new employees, (2) fellows should be provided with the necessary time and financial resources prior to beginning the program, and (3) choosing fellows should be done with care and should take into account their maturity level, personality, and prior professional experiences in order to enhance their successful completion of the program. (Contains 13 references). (GLR)

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The Minority Graduate Fellowship Program: A Program for Initiating Minorities into the Professoriate

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Introduction

The literature relative to the numbers of minorities in the higher education professoriate is extensive. Most observers note the shortage of qualified minorities who aspire to acquire doctoral degrees and, who having once matriculated, complete the doctorate. Therefore, the recruitment and socialization of potential minority faculty into the professoriate is an issue (Bunzel, 1990; Collins & Johnson, 1990; Blackwell, 1988; Wilson, 1988; Wyche & Frierson, 1990). One way to address this concern is to design programs to recruit, select, and support minority doctoral students who have a desire to enter the Academy. The intent program is that they benefit from the experience and develop a support system to help them succeed in their pursuit of their goals while being socialized to the role of professors.

This paper is a description of the Minority Graduate Fellowship Program which was created by the West Virginia Graduate College. The program was established by the College to increase the minority presence within its faculty while assisting young professionals with their socialization into the professoriate. The following observations are based upon the experiences of the co-authors, a Minority Graduate Fellow and a Professor who both hold positions in the Educational Leadership department. The paper describes the strengths and

weaknesses of the program, and makes several recommendations to assist those who might be considering establishing similar programs.

Literature

The ever-increasing growth of culturally-diverse student populations, and the inability to increase minority faculty who serve them, is a matter of great concern for colleges and universities (Collins & Johnson, 1990; Makay, 1990; Baker, 1990). Schools are being pressured directly and indirectly by segments of their communities and various outside agencies to increase the presence of minority faculty on their campuses(Wilson, 1988). Advocates believe that minority faculty play essential roles as mentors and role models. They also believe that these faculty bring a multi-cultural, multi-dimensional focus to the curriculum (Collins & Johnson, 1990; Bunzel, 1990; Wyche & Frierson, 1990, Wilson, 1988; Blackwell, 1988).

The paucity of minority faculty is further exacerbated by the prediction of a shortage of college professors by the year 2000 (Tallerico, 1991; Wyche & Frierson, 1990; Juarez, 1988; McCarthy, 1988). These authors indicate that many professors, mostly white males, who entered the professoriate during the sixties and seventies, will soon retire. One might conclude that this will benefit minorities because they will be able to assume these soon to be vacated positions. However, there has been a significant decline in the number of minorities pursuing positions in academia (Leatherman, 1992; Makay, 1990). Scholars

believe that these positions will not be filled by ethnic minorities because there has been a decline in the number of minorities entering the higher education "pipeline" (Leatherman, 1992; Juarez, 1991; Makay, 1990; Bunzel, 1990; Baker, 1990; Wilson, 1988). The most dramatic decline can be found among African-Americans entering and completing undergraduate school and continuing on to graduate or professional school (Wilson, 1988). Moreover, many who complete their post-graduate studies are not attracted to faculty positions in higher education because the private sector is more financially lucrative (Juarez, 1991).

Colleges and universities assert that they are unable to recruit ethnic minorities even among those who are interested in entering the professoriate. They cite geographical location, an unwillingness of potential candidates to relocate to areas that lack the support of a minority community, a shortage of minority candidates with doctoral degrees, and their inability to compete financially with larger, well-known institutions that can offer candidates better salaries and fringe benefits as reasons for their inability to diversify their faculties (Makay, 1990).

To address the impending shortage of faculty and the need to increase minority faculty, schools continue to use traditional recruiting methods (Makay, 1990). Although these strategies should continue to be employed, schools must become more proactive and develop even more creative and imaginative

strategies and mechanisms to insure their success (Makay, 1990; Blackwell, Cooper & Smith, 1990).

Although recruiting minority faculty is essential, it is also the responsibility of institutions to help ensure their success once employed. Therefore, schools must focus on how minorities are socialized within their institutions (Baker, 1990; Blackwell, 1988). Teaching several courses, providing service to the institution and community, and the pressure to "get published" can be anxiety-provoking for those entering the professoriate. Minority faculty members confront additional pressures because they usually lack the luxury of having role models from their ethnic group that they can identify with during this critical period of induction (Baker, 1990).

The Program

The West Virginia Graduate College, located in Appalachia, serves a somewhat homogeneous population, and is a school established to provide graduate degrees and professional development programs. The curriculum and program is traditional. The mode of delivery, however, is unique because the College does not have a campus, the faculty travel to teach their classes, and there is an emphasis on using distance education technologies.

The College's School of Education, Human Services and Humanities, while completing their National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) self-study, identified various multicultural issues that needed

to be addressed (Childress & Hall, 1992). One significant issue was the school's lack of minority representation on its faculty. Earlier in its history, the College had taken steps to attract qualified minorities to its faculty, however, traditional attempts were futile (Childress & Hall, 1992). Therefore, the school designed and implemented the Minority Graduate Fellowship Program in an attempt to address this need. During the 1991-92 school year, three minority fellows were selected for program participation.

The goals of the Minority Graduate Fellowship Program are three-fold: (1) To increase the presence of minorities on the faculty. (2) To recruit minorities to a geographical area in which there has been a steady decline in the professional ethnic minority population. (3) To bring minority doctoral students who are in the final stages of their program to the college as full-time, non-tenured faculty. This experience provided an opportunity for the fellows to gain experience as graduate faculty members while being socialized to the professoriate.

Discussion

This section will discuss the Minority Graduate Fellowship Program's strengths and weaknesses, and based upon these observations, propose recommendations for those wishing to initiate similar programs.

Strengths

1) The greatest strength of the program is the deep commitment to the program by the Dean and the President. Both emphasized from the beginning that they supported the program both in terms of resource allocation and commitment. It was made clear to faculty that the expectation was that the program would succeed.

2) Another strength was that the program when it began was not formally structured. This allowed the fellows freedom to identify areas in which they wished to become more proficient and to choose activities to which they were better suited. The lack of formal structure is very typical of the West Virginia Graduate College, a school without walls, with a mission of outreach teaching, and distance education. Given this modus operandi the fellows' choice of activity and freedom of choice was amenable and consistent with the way the school and the faculty operated for more than 20 years. This lack of formal structure was a major strength of the program, but it also presented some problems for the fellows, which will be discussed later as a weaknesses.

3) The diversity of the Graduate College's Educational Leadership faculty was a strength of the program. The faculty received its training in diverse locations and schools ranging from those in Northeast, the South, and from the Midwest. Given this diversity of formal training, and subsequent faculty interests and proclivities, the Fellow was provided with a broad array of options and

interests from which to choose their program foci. The Fellow who is the co-author of this article initially participated in a broad range of academic activities including evaluating a training program for central office administrators, instruction in computer applications for data analysis, teaching formal courses, and supervising administrative interns in the public schools. Additionally, the Fellow was able to work through some basic logistical professorial issues such as assigning grades, how to interact with graduate students, and what the expectations are of professors as perceived by both students and the college's administration.

4) The Graduate College is housed on the campus of West Virginia State College (WVSC), an undergraduate institution of approximately 4000 students. The interaction between the two institutions have traditionally been active and cooperative. As a result, the Fellow was able to contract with WVSC to teach undergraduate courses consistent with his interests and formal training. The mix of both graduate and undergraduate teaching experiences allowed the Fellow to make informed and experientially based decisions relative to future careers in higher education.

5) Given the aforementioned lack of formal structure (see #2), one feature of this informality became salient. The Fellow was allowed through an evolutionary process of interaction to choose his mentor. Over a period of several months, the Fellow was able to decide which of the faculty he wished to

become his role model and confidant. The resulting mentor-protege relationship was by mutual choice, developed over an extended period of time, and was not determined through an assignment process. Resultingly, the mentor-protege relationship being described here has become meaningful and enlightening for both persons. Extensive discussions have ensued as to what combinations of training, experiences, and personality brought this relationship about, but answers are at this point conjectural. Regardless of reason, a key point at this juncture is that the Fellow was able to make his own choices, and this has created most viable interactions for both protege and mentor.

6) A program strength, that was noted quite by accident, was the Fellow was allowed entry into the program well ahead of the time when the program was to formally begin. The Fellow, who is the co-author of this article, arrived in the early summer for the program which ostensibly began in the fall semester. Resultingly, he was able to deal with all the logistical problems attendant with any move, such as acquiring housing, and adjusting to a new environment prior to the formal beginning of the program. Additionally, this pre-program time allowed the Fellow to begin an acculturation process which defined how minorities are perceived and interact within the confines of the school and community cultures.

7) A strength of note which became apparent over time was that the past experiences of the fellows played a major role in the predicting success in the

program. All the Fellows were mature persons with broad and diverse experiential backgrounds. This maturity manifest itself in several ways, most notably through the their diligence to task, acceptance of responsibility, and productivity.

8) The mentor-protege relationship being highlighted here was enhanced by the personality of the protege. He possessed a gregarious, outgoing, interactional style which made his initiation much more productive for all concerned.

9) A notable strength of the program was that both formal and informal support systems did exist within the college to assure the smooth initiation of the Fellows to the professoriate. The mentor who is the co-author of the article conducts a formal class call Advanced Research in Educational Leadership (Ed-L 765). It is a course in which doctoral candidates learn how to write a dissertation prospectus. The Fellows voluntarily participated in this class each semester and to varying degrees moved forward in this endeavor. Concurrently, the mentor also volunteers his time and conducts an informal seminar group called the "Elevator Gang" which meets regularly at a site off-campus. This informal support group critiques each others work and through group interaction improvement takes place. The concept of having an informal support network has proven to be most effective, and is attested to by the success of the participants.

10) Given the varied choices afforded the Fellows, the last noted strength is that they were allowed to focus on skills that they felt the greatest need to acquire and/or to improve. These skills included formal writing skills, conceptualizations skills, and the ability to analyze and synthesize the relationships among and between appropriate administrative variables.

Weaknesses

1) The program, because of its informal nature, did have a need to consider some important issues that it initially failed to address. The Fellow who is the co-author of this paper was unaware of the significant cultural differences between where he was raised, educated, and worked, and the prevailing culture in Appalachia. There are few African-Americans in West Virginia and the local population has many pre-conceived notions about racial minorities. The Fellow had several incidents that were unexpected and unsettling. The obvious need, therefore, is for some sort of cultural orientation for Fellows, so as to minimize the impact of initial cultural experiences. Subsequent experiences with other newly hired faculty would indicate an overall need for orientation activities for all persons new to the culture.

2) As may be noted in #2 of the program strengths, the program was initially relatively unstructured. Although a program strength, the lack of structure did present some problems for the Fellow. Given the inquisitive nature of the Fellow, he tended to become initially involved in too many activities that

tended to deflect the Fellow from superordinate goals of importance. Ultimately, the most important task for a participant in this program, is to finish their dissertation. This endeavor is the most important task in that dissertation completion and the subsequent awarding of the doctoral degree is the prime prerequisite for initiation into the professoriate. Care needs to be taken to insure that this "goal deflection" doesn't take place.

3) Conversely, and antithetical to #2 above, is the issue that free choice many times precluded the Fellow from participating in activities that would have broadened his initiation to the professoriate. The Fellow, for example, did not participate in any activities that allowed him to understand the faculty governance system, thereby failing to experience an integral part of the life of a professor.

4) The lack of program structure also presented another problem for the Fellow. His prior job was a principal in a secondary school. His world was highly structured and consisted of long days of fairly consistent role expectations. The world of the professor is significantly less structured and the role expectations are more heterogeneous than that of a principal. Care should be taken to assure that this difficult adjustment to the differences in organizational cultures be as smooth as possible.

5) One factor that proved to be a hardship for the Fellows was the failure of program designers to recognize the need to provide moving expenses for

participants. Resultingly, the Fellows all experienced budgetary difficulties upon first relocating.

6) The program did not have any procedure whereby the Fellow could formally interact with prime decision makers and peers. Given this, communication between the Fellows and decision-makers was at best inconsistent and sporadic. There is a need for a system of communication that assures regularized interaction so that meaningful formative data can be generated for appropriate program reform.

Recommendations

Given the foregoing discussion relative to perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program, the recommendations for program improvement become relatively straightforward.

1) The program structure should be a balance between a fellows' free choice of activity and assurances that the candidates have a broad enough set of experiences to initiate them into the professoriate.

2) A specific orientation program should be part of the early experiences of the fellows, and indeed, all new employees. An introduction to the school and its organizational culture and the culture of the surrounding community is imperative. Additionally, a "how to" component should be included that addresses issues such as how to acquire appropriate housing, how to acquire a drivers license, etc.

3) Fellows should be provided time and financial resources prior to the formal beginning of the program to assure appropriate adjustment to the school and the community.

4) Fellows should be chosen with care. Maturity level, personality, and prior professional experiences should be carefully considered during the selection process. Mature persons, with outgoing and gregarious personalities, and a broad set of job related experiences, tend to be more successful in this type of program.

5) Superordinate goals should always be the focus of the program. For instance, dissertation completion is the program's primary goal. Failure to meet this goal renders all other program activities moot. Great care should be taken to insure that this "goal deflection" does not take place.

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